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SUBJECT: ANECDOTES ON RULING PARTY RIFTS

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 1B. ADDIS 3188
 1C. ADDIS 1554

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) In a series of recent conversations with individuals close to the government and/or to individuals within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, we have heard reports of several looming rifts and internal tensions within each EPRDF sub-party. While we cannot confirm the truth behind these anecdotes as internal ruling party dynamics are among the most closely held Ethiopian secrets, each appears plausible and consistent with other personnel shifts in the recent past.

THE TIGRAYAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)

12. (S/NF) According to UK citizen Patrick Gilkes (strictly protect) who is now a strategic planning advisor to the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, in the summer 2008 TPLF party Congress, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi did not receive the most votes for party Chairmanship. Allegedly, former Mayor of Addis Ababa and currently the State Minister for Works and Urban Development Arkebe Equbay, long a TPLF Politbureau member, received more votes than both Meles and Seyoum Mesfin, the Foreign Minister and TPLF Vice Chairman. Gilkes argues that, recognizing the center of gravity surrounding Meles, Arkebe declined the party Chairmanship and Vice Chairmanship. Gilkes reported that the vote of dissent stemmed largely from lingering frustrations among the party over the still-unresolved territorial dispute with Eritrea over Badme (which the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission awarded to Eritrea in 2002, but Ethiopia continues to claim and occupy) as well as over the economic down turn which has taken a huge toll on the Tigray region.

THE AMHARA NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (ANDM)

13. (S/NF) Former TPLF Central Committee member and former Defense Minister Seeye Abraha told us on November 3 of an emerging rift in the senior leadership of the ANDM. Seeye, who despite being out of favor with the government retains a lot of long-held friends and contacts within the ruling coalition, suggested that Deputy Prime Minister Adissu Legesse and Advisor to the Prime Minister Bereket Simon feature prominently in an emerging &status-quo8 faction, while Capacity Building Minister Tefera Walwa may be prominent among a dissenting faction. The ANDM ousted Tefera from his Vice Chairmanship -- and according to some news reports from the Executive Committee -- in September,

replacing him with Meles-confidant Bereket Simon. Seeye suggested that the dissenters may be frustrated by the pre-eminence of the TPLF in the Ethiopian Government (GoE) and EPRDF without giving the ANDM a larger share of the pie. He also argued that on-going tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan, which has cost the Amhara region a large chunk of territory, combined with the GoE's response of sweeping the issue under the rug may be another aggravating factor driving the dissenters. Gilkes confirmed this information to Pol/Econ Chief on December 18.

THE SOUTHERN ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

¶4. (S/NF) In early 2006 as ethnic tensions in southern Oromiya and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) began to erupt, the Sidamo people -- numbering roughly seven million -- began expressing frustration within the SEPDM and EPRDF about not having adequate representation in government. Patrick Gilkes argues that to placate the Sidamo, the federal government orchestrated the removal -- officially a resignation -- of ethnic Welaita SEPDM Chairman Hailemariam Desalegn as SNNPR Regional President in March 2006, allowing ethnic Sidamo SEPDM Politbureau member Shiferaw Shikute (alternate spelling "Shigute") to take over the post. While the move did respond to some Sidamo complaints, the Sidamo reportedly still feel disenfranchised by the fact that the GoE has not yet established the Sidamo region as a formal administrative zone, which would provide greater self-rule and access to targeted federal resource transfers. At the same time, while Hailemariam's move to an

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Advisor position, with the rank of Minister, within the Prime Minister's Office in April 2006 and as EPRDF Chief Whip in Parliament in November 2008 (Ref. A), maintained him in prominent positions, many Welaita allegedly still feel aggrieved by the TPLF for his 2006 removal from the regional presidency. Both Seeye and Gilkes suggested that the SEPDM's removal of ethnic Gurage Dr. Kassu Ilala, a former Deputy Prime Minister, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, and former SEPDM Party Chairman, may have also displeased the small but influential Gurage community.

THE OROMO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (OPDO)

¶5. (S/NF) Some have argued that the OPDO's backing of Prime Minister Meles in the 2001 TPLF split was critical to his survival and earned the OPDO Meles' debt. As reported in Ref. B, however, recent efforts to reconcile the banned Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) with the GoE appear to have spurred concern among the OPDO regarding the EPRDF's support for the party. The September return to Ethiopia of Ababiya Abajobir, and rumored plans for OLF former leaders Leencho Lata and Dima Negewo to return to Ethiopia in the spring of 2009, however, may cause further uncertainty within the OPDO in the months to come.

EPRDF-AFFILIATED PARTIES: FROM BENISHANGUL...

¶6. (S/NF) While the EPRDF is a coalition of the four, above-noted parties, several other parties have affiliated themselves with the EPRDF and vote as a block with the ruling coalition. While the EPRDF has not approved full member status to many of these parties, their loyalty to the ruling coalition has earned them a fair degree of autonomy to govern their more distant regions. In the far west, the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF) has enjoyed broad discretion in administering its region. The outbreak of brutal ethnic conflict, apparently orchestrated by some Benishangul-Gumuz (B-G) regional officials against the Oromos outside of Nekempt town in May (Ref. C), however, embarrassed the central government. The arrest of the regional vice president in response to the

clash presented a tolerable response by federal authorities. Gilkes, however, argues that the GoE's October 22 dispatch of National Security Advisor Abay Tsehay, Hailemariam Desalegn, and then Federal Affairs Minister Siraj Fegessa to the B-G capital to force the resignation of regional President Yaregal Ayisheshum over the incident has sparked antagonism among the BGPDUF who resent the encroachment on their loyal autonomy.

...AND THE SOMALI PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SPDP)

¶7. (S/NF) An SPDP regional councilmember based in Dire Dawa recently described for us SPDP intraparty tensions related to the SPDP leadership's adherence to EPRDF policies and practices. The councilmember said that "in general the (EPRDF established) Ethiopian Constitution is acceptable, but the reality on the ground is different. There is no intraparty democracy. The top leaders dictate, based on loyalty. If you criticize, you are branded as the opposition. Nor is there any intraparty dissent. SPDP leaders trample their own regulations and by-laws. If you point it out, they can sack you, prevent you from work, make you subservient." The SPDP regional councilmember said the SPDP leadership's autocratic tendencies simply reflect the EPRDF's authoritarian practices. "We are hoping for free and fair elections and a level playing field," he said, "but we are not there now. It would be better if Ethiopia followed global practices. The National Electoral Board is not free and fair. The recent census was sad and unreliable. I don't even know how many people elected me." The SPDP regional councilmember added that "The police should be independent, but they are not. They serve the EPRDF, not the public. If the ruling party tells them to arrest someone, they do; if ruling party says release them, they release them. The judiciary is also not free and fair and just does the bidding of the ruling party. People are prosecuted for their way of thinking, not their actions. The police trump up charges, such as 'colluding with anti-peace elements' and they can even revoke the immunity of regional councilmembers. Roughly 17 members of the Somali Regional Council are in jail simply

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for expressing their views. I asked (SPDP leadership): 'how is it possible the party can be judge, jury and executioner?' and they replied 'because we said so.' So, many of our regional council member self-censor."

¶8. (S/NF) The SPDP regional councilmember cautioned that many in the SPDP are beginning to resent the EPRDF and their own leadership. "The Somali region was historically neglected," he said, "but in the past 17 years there have been few tangible changes and lately conditions are regressing. The government has taken no action to solve the problem of water shortages. We are all nationalist Ethiopians but within the SPDP rank and file the mind-set is changing. Instead of cooperating and helping Somali Region development, the EPRDF (and SPDP leadership) dictates, arrests and intimidates."

COMMENT

¶9. (S/NF) Again, while we cannot independently confirm the anecdotes reported above, the corroboration of many by separate, unconnected sources and their correlation with other known developments renders them quite plausible. Independently, few if any of these dynamics is likely to pose an immediate impact on larger scale GoE or bilateral dynamics. At the same time, they do suggest an increasingly tenuous degree of tension at the center for the TPLF to hold things together. The competing priorities of clientelism and ethnic patronage risks the GoE (and specifically the TPLF) spreading itself too thin in responding to disparate demands without adequately being able to respond fully to any. Concessions within the ruling coalition also risks further squeezing the opposition to please allies, which may further

contribute to the already palpable political tension in Ethiopia as we move toward the run-up to the 2010 national elections. As such, in the absence of outside encouragement for the GoE to ease the crack-down on political dissent, internal dynamics are likely only to lead the ruling party to pursue its increasingly fragile current approach to governance and control. Another concern is that Meles himself was almost overthrown by the TPLF Central Committee in 2001 and remains highly sensitive to criticism and changes in TPLF attitudes toward him. End Comment.

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